



PRESS RELEASE

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MAN CONVICTED OF HOSTAGE TAKING RECEIVES 10 YEARS IN PRISON

TUCSON, Ariz. -- The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on July 30, 2004, Francisco Verdugo-Fernandez, DOB 10/4/77, of Mexico was sentenced to ten years in prison to be followed by five years supervised release. Verdugo-Fernandez and four co-defendants, Andres Torres-Castro, DOB 11/9/82; Jesus Manuel Palma-Soto, DOB 3/25/85; Eduardo Loriel Soto, DOB 12/9/78; Jesus Ernesto Solis-Torres, DOB 11/6/86; pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Hostage Taking in federal district court in Tucson, Ariz.

The defendants had been charged with violating Title 18 of the United States Code, Section 1203. On March 29, 2004 the defendants approached a group of 23 undocumented aliens who were walking through the desert near Three Points, Ariz. The defendants had numerous firearms, including a rifle and more than one handgun. The defendants ordered the group to lay on the ground while they robbed them. The defendants told the group that they would be taken to a nearby trailer where members of the group could contact a family member

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to pay a ransom. One member of the group escaped and contacted a Department of Public Safety officer at the junction of State Route 286 and State Route 86. The subject led U.S. Border

Patrol officers to the area where the group was last seen and they were eventually able to locate the group still in the desert. The five defendants fled the scene but were later apprehended. Border Patrol recovered a rifle, a .38 caliber handgun and numerous rounds of ammunition.

A conviction for conspiracy to commit hostage taking carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine or both. Depending on their criminal history, the co-defendants will be sentenced to 108 -135 months imprisonment, according to the plea agreement.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Pima County Sheriff's Department, Department of Public Safety and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The prosecution is being handled by Gerard M. Guerin, Assistant US Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

CASE NUMBER: CR-04-1064-005-TUC-FRZ
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